

Now It's the LAW By Lynn Schlueter



Efforts to thwart aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota are organized and focused.

Last year, various state agencies and private groups worked together to prepare a statewide plan, which defines an on-going educational campaign, monitoring activities, and provides suggestions for needed ANS regulations. The plan has since been approved by Governor John Hoeven.

During the 2005 legislative session, lawmakers, understanding the need to safeguard the state after seeing what leafy spurge did after it unknowingly spread into North Dakota a century ago, studied an ANS prevention bill. Overwhelmingly, the bill passed the House and Senate, giving the statewide plan official status, and for regulations to be written to prevent movement of aquatic nuisance species into or within the state. The law, which allows for stern penalties for anyone who contributes to the spread of aquatic nuisance species, goes into effect August 1.

North Dakotans who think that ANS will not affect them, simply because they're not the outdoor type, are mistaken. Aquatic nuisance species are a financial burden because they can plug water intakes, adding to operation costs of water treatment plants and the monthly bills of its users.

The same problems occur in cooling towers of power plants, which must be shut down for cleaning. The customer, again, sees this in their monthly electrical bills. When resorts and marinas close, the local tax burden is shifted, programs can be cut, and taxpayers are stuck paying bigger bills or receiving less service.

The hidden costs from aquatic nuisance species are real.

To prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species, outdoor recreationists need to take the time to remove hitchhikers.

Aquatic Nuisance Species

ANS prevention has been an ongoing effort by natural resource agencies and groups concerned with maintaining the state's natural resources. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department began its ANS prevention efforts in the early 1990s, and has continued to build on these programs. In recent years, state agencies have included ANS prevention provisions in the permits they issue. Hunting and fishing groups are asking members to take precautions to prevent ANS from being transported into the state. Garden nurseries and pet stores are refusing to carry plants or animals that could cause problems if they escape or are released into the wild.

ANS prevention is certainly a team effort to keep infestations from spreading to North Dakota.

The problem is that aquatic nuisance species are easily moved and those spreading the problem may not be aware of it. It's hard to believe that there are at least 22 pathways – based on known activities – for ANS to be brought into North Dakota. For example, out-of-state salvage divers, who may have worked in waters containing aquatic nuisance

species, have removed or helped place bridge pilings in the state. Or the tugboat that worked barges on the Red River a couple of years ago was trucked to Grand Forks from a southern state. While these two examples are not common, it shows the range of activities that can introduce ANS to our state's waters.

While it's the movement from an infested area to North Dakota that is concerning, there is also the worry of North Dakotans going elsewhere to hunt, fish, or participate in some water-based recreation, and bringing ANS home with them.

Aquatic nuisance species are hitchhikers, catching free rides to new locations. Many of us, however, are not aware there is a hitchhiker in or on our boat, trailer, bait, or new plant for the water garden. Once an area is infested, there is little hope of preventing problems or its spread. Aquatic nuisance species are difficult to control and desirable species are often lost in the fight with pesticides.

ANS infestations dramatically alter the environments that support desirable fish and other animal populations. The presence of



The Usual Suspects

Eurasian water milfoil – Forms thick stands that hamper boating and fishing; hinders small ducks from swimming through mats; provides too much cover, leading to stunted fish populations and few large fish.

Curly leaf pondweed – Grows to a deep depth and forms thick stands; difficult to fish in; dies in late summer and decaying vegetation and seeds for next years plants drift about the fishery.

Zebra mussel – Grow in huge, dense colonies; strip water column of zooplankton, phytoplankton and organic material; reduces or removes food items needed by small game fish and other animals.

Spiny water flea – Prey on zooplankton that small fish need; undesirable as a food item to small fish or waterfowl.

Common carp and rudd – Grow large in a short time; eat insects and other invertebrates small game fish desire; root on the bottom while feeding, dislodging plants and bottom sediments which increases the water's turbidity; crowds out desirable fish.

Ruffe – Small fish that resembles a walleye; eats the same foods as small walleye and yellow perch; reproduces in high numbers.

Goby – Small fish that lives on the bottom and eats same foods as game fish; will raid nests and readily consumes eggs of other fish.

Silver carp and bighead carp – Grow large; compete with sturgeon and paddlefish for food; reproduce in large numbers; replace numbers of desirable fish; potential hazard to boaters.

Powerwash your boat, motor or personal watercraft and trailer with water 110 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter to rid equipment of unwanted hitchhikers.





Drain water from the boat motor, livewell, bilge, and behind the transom before leaving the lake.

ANS Prevention

Prevention is vital to keeping aquatic nuisance species out of North Dakota, which includes your favorite fishing and hunting area. The following guidelines help keep ANS from hitchhiking into our waters:

- Inspect your boat or personal watercraft, trailer, fishing or scuba gear, and remove all plants, plant fragments and mud before leaving the lake.
- Drain water from the boat motor, livewell, bilge, and behind the transom before leaving that lake.
- Powerwash your boat, motor or PWC, and trailer with water 110 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter.
- Disinfect livewell and bilge with a bleach solution (one part chlorine to 20 parts hot water). Wash using water 100 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter.
- Disinfect fishing, hunting, scuba or other gear with the aforementioned bleach solution and hot water. Allow equipment to air dry thoroughly.
- Do not dump bait, or the water the bait was transported in, into the lake. Do not move fish from one lake to another.
- Place excess bait in fish grinder, garbage or bury at home.
- Return fish into the lake from which they came.
- Do not transplant fish to other lakes, it's illegal.
- Do not release pets or aquatic garden plants into the wild. Dispose of unwanted pets or aquatic plants to proper facilities.

It takes only a few minutes to prevent ANS problems. For more information, contact the nearest North Dakota Game and Fish Department office.

Aquatic Nuisance Species

undesirable species typically results in the decline of indigenous species to the environment.

It is common for people to think that stocking enough fish can overcome any fisheries management problem, but just adding fish is not the answer. The real problem is that aquatic nuisance species degrade aquatic habitats, reducing the number of game fish – and waterfowl – a body of water can produce. Aquatic nuisance species are able to reproduce in large numbers so quickly, they simply overwhelm the environment, thus

influencing species, numbers and size of desirable fish that can live there.

To maintain North Dakota's current fishery, we must prevent ANS from being introduced into our state's waters.

Prevention – simply cleaning your boat, trailer and other gear of hitchhikers – is also a lot less costly than combating the unwanted when they arrive.

LYNN SCHLUETER is a special projects biologist with the Game and Fish Department's

Wildlife official urge anglers not to dump their bait, or the water it was transported in, into the lake.

